

ANN LARSEN

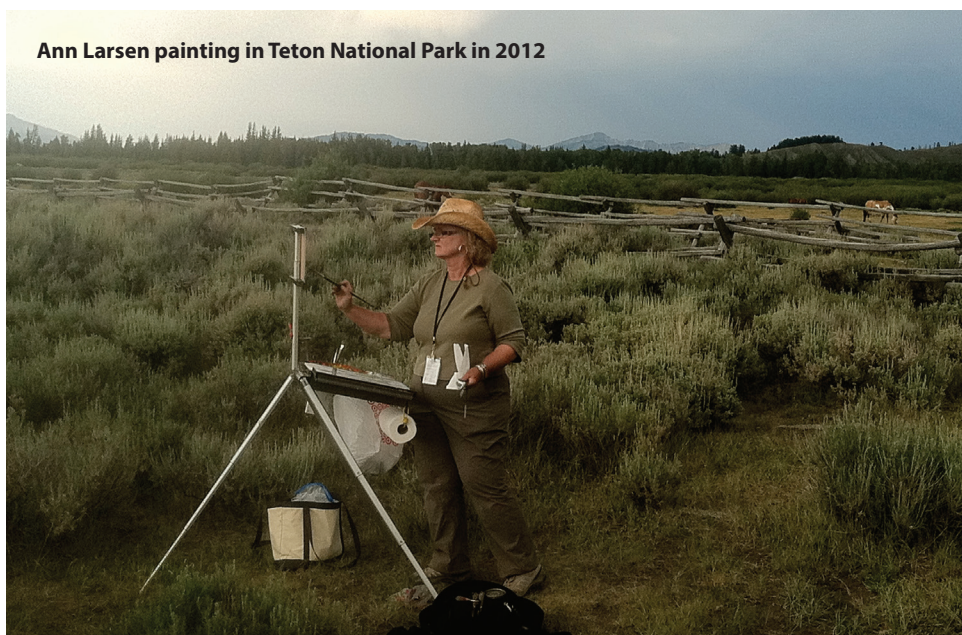
Advocating for Women Artists, Including Herself

New York artist Ann Larsen strikes a balance between patience and advocacy when it comes to advancing her own art career and those of other women. That works to her benefit, as well as for American Women Artists, a national group that provides for its members.

Sheryl Sandberg, one of the top executives at Facebook, was recently in the news after releasing her book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. During numerous interviews, Sandberg used the term “lean in” to assert that women need to empower themselves and each other to achieve greater success in fields that have been dominated by men. New York artist Ann Larsen believes that one of those fields is definitely the fine arts. Statistics support Larsen’s assertion that the number of female artists who have been widely recognized is small both as a percentage of the total number of women artists and in comparison with men. She and the group over which she presides as president, the American Women Artists, aim to address that imbalance by helping women artists “lean in” through education, support, and opportunities to exhibit in nationally recognized galleries and museums.

“AWA was founded about 25 years ago by Sherrie McGraw, Joan Potter, Star York, and others, and the first exhibition they organized was at the Tucson Museum of Art,” Larsen explains. “We will present our 16th annual national juried competition and member show in November of this year, and we are a growing, dynamic organization. AWA is dedicated to inspiration, celebration, and encouragement of women in the arts, and we accomplish those goals for the 500-plus members by offering professional opportunities, promotions through a newsletter and website, exhibitions and awards, and networking.”

Clearly Larsen and the AWA are “leaning in” to empower women artists and bring broader attention to their creative achievements. “It’s a shame we don’t know



Ann Larsen painting in Teton National Park in 2012

more about the great women artists of the past who didn’t get much attention from dealers, collectors, and historians,” says Larsen. “When I discover some of those artists, I find their paintings can be just as informative and inspiring as ones created by men of the same time. Moreover, many of them laid the foundations for the art schools, societies, and museums that nurtured generations of artists, especially in the Western states where art organizations were formed in the first half of the 20th century.

“Although the balance of attention and recognition has shifted in the right direction in recent years, more can be done to give everyone the confidence and the opportunity to succeed, especially women artists. A lot of what the AWA does is to empower members to achieve their

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Ann Larsen

BIRTHDATE: 1949

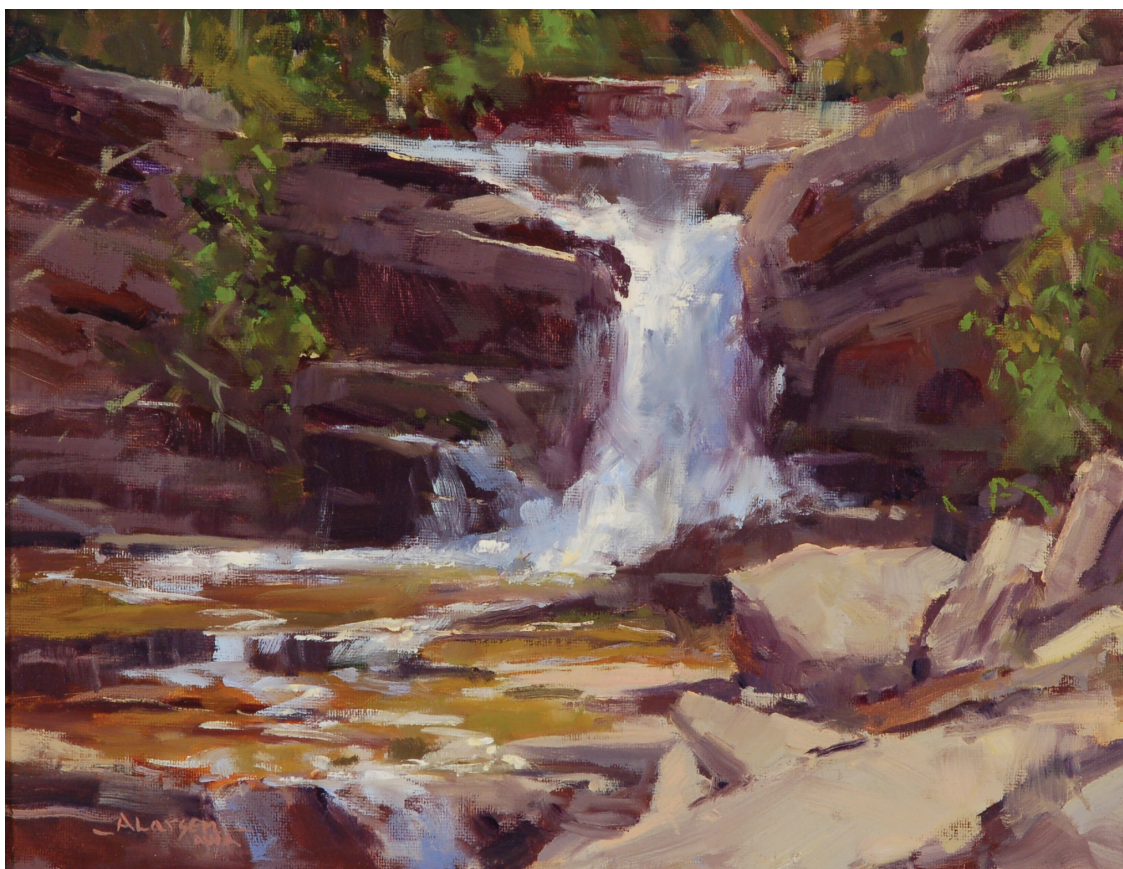
LOCATION: Saratoga Springs, NY

INFLUENCES: “Marion Kavanaugh Wachtel, Edgar Payne, Carl Rungius, and many modern masters such as Jean LeGassick and Matt Smith.”

WEBSITE: www.annlarsen.com

goals, whatever those may be. We provide community, education, and exhibition opportunities, three things every artist can benefit from.”

Although American Women Artists and the issues it raises are important to Larsen,



Hidden Falls

2011, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Private collection

Plein air

dense landscapes of the Northeast and the opportunity to paint some favorite locations during different seasons of the year,” she says. “And then I can consider an entirely different sense of space, light, and color when I travel to other parts of the country. For me, plein air painting is a means to an end, and many of my outdoor sketches become the basis of studio paintings.

“I don’t mind going off by myself to paint, but I also enjoy the company of artist friends and the interest of the general public. I welcome the opportunity to share the experience of plein air painting with people who stop to observe what I am doing, and I treasure the camaraderie among the friends I have made during festivals.”

On location, Larsen works with a relatively limited palette of warm and cool variations of the primary colors and white, and she sometimes starts painting with the so-called “Zorn palette,” just three colors and white. “The same few colors give me an endless range of possibilities,” she says. “I can intensify the strength of the colors when a Western scene calls for a greater degree of contrast, or I can subdue the values when there is a lot of atmosphere and filtered light.

“I aim to have a strong compositional organization of simplified shapes, and I’ve been

she has many other interests as well, including a love of travel and of painting. “One of the things I immediately liked when I started doing plein air painting 10 years ago was the opportunity to work outdoors in a wide variety of locations,” she says. “My husband, Gary Larsen, is a photographer, and we both enjoy responding to the landscape in our own way. It’s a nice collaboration because we discover great locations together. If I settle down in one location to paint for two or three hours, he may scout the surrounding area and return with photographs of places I want to paint. We did that in Yellowstone and Teton National Parks in 2012. He went off to take photographs and came back with images that motivated me to head there after finishing up where I was working.”

Traveling Far & Wide

“We travel west quite often,” Larsen says, “and now that I am a member of the Rocky Mountain Plein Air Painters I’ll go back to Jackson, Wyoming, this year for their national paint-out and exhibition. I’m also a member of the Outdoor Painters Society in Texas and Laguna Plein Air Painters in California, I’ve been invited to join Plein Air Vermont in the fall, and Gary and I often travel south to work. I love painting in all those regions of the country, and next year I may spend as much as

three months in California when the weather in Upstate New York is not conducive to outdoor painting.” To manage those painting trips that involve air travel, Larsen organizes her art supplies into one suitcase and her clothes in another, and she has a trusted framer send appropriately sized frames to her destination.

All this travel gives Larsen the opportunity to paint a wide variety of subjects, both outdoors and in her studio. She tends to paint intimate scenes near her home base in Upstate New York and expansive views in the West. “I love the lush,



Dirt Road

2011, oil, 11 x 14 in.

Private collection

Plein air



Eucalyptus in Fog
2013, oil, 8 x 6 in.
Courtesy Sorelle Gallery, Albany, NY
Plein air



Morning Light
2012, oil, 11 x 14 in.
Collection Remington
Museum,
Ogdensburg, NY
Plein air

Fishing Pier at Jekyll Island
2013, oil, 12 x 16 in.
Collection the artist
Plein air





Late Day Coast

2013, oil, 16 x 20 in.

Collection the artist


Studio

influenced by artists like Maynard Dixon and Edgar Payne in that regard. I do keep in mind some of the formal ideas about how to organize a picture, and I am conscious of the directional flow of brushwork, the need to repeat shapes, and the importance of balancing large and small shapes. I often lay in the important shapes with vine charcoal as a way of thinking about composition without the issue of color coming into play, and when I am satisfied with the design, I wipe off the excess charcoal so it doesn't darken the oil colors once I begin painting. I then redraw the basic lines with a thin mixture of oil color to keep myself focused on having a strong composition with a distinct center of interest."

Sense & Feel

"As I am working, I'm particularly interested in the way the brush marks convey the sense and

the feel of what I am observing," Larsen goes on. "I sometime use a palette knife when I think an area needs more paint than I can quickly add with a bristle brush. I try to avoid painting too many details unless there is a structure in the landscape that needs to be accurately drawn and rendered to make it read correctly."

Larsen teaches privately in her studio and through the Saratoga (New York) Arts Council, and she accepts invitations to teach workshops in other locations — as she will soon in Waxahatchee, Texas. She is normally very hands-on when teaching students and will work on their paintings after asking permission. Her students often comment on the value they derive from class critiques. 

M. Stephen Doherty is editor of *PleinAir* magazine.



See more plein air and studio paintings by Ann Larsen in the expanded digital edition of *PleinAir*.

Surf Song

2010, oil, 8 x 10 in.

Private collection

Plein air

